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# **The Class Politics of Prejudice: Brexit and the Land of no-Hope and Glory**

## **Introduction**

The politics connected to class inequality and class struggle have always been part of the consciousness of the British subject. The fact that we are subjects of the British Monarchy rather than citizens of a United Kingdom by its very nature means that we cannot escape the hierarchical politics of class. The debates relating to social class and whether it is still a useful concept in describing a lived reality of the British population has never been far away from media, political and academic dispute. Thatcher's Britain throughout the 1980s attempted to dilute class meaning with what was called 'a home owning democracy' and thus end class collective politics through easily available credit for the working class while simultaneously attacking trade union organisation, recruitment, and political action.

During the late 1990's and into the noughties a 'New Labour' administration attempted to exacerbate the end of class politics through an agenda of a 'cultural distinction' to class identity. Class struggle, class politics, and class identity is embedded deep within the cultural norms practices, and history of British democracy. Consequently it is difficult if not impossible to prise class inequality in the UK away from and out of national, local and personal politics (Savage 2015 pp.393-398).

The long standing debate between the economic and cultural distinction in relation to class inequality continues, and has come to the forefront of political discussion in recent years as the political agenda seems unstable and unpredictable. Charles Booth the social scientist responsible for mapping and classifying London's population during the 1880's clearly sought a distinction between what he considered the 'respectable working class' and the 'residuum' (Welshman J. 2006 :13). The former a class that was industrious and able to organise and take part in politics, and the 'residuum' a social problem that held no political threat to wider society. Although Booth used Darwinist language he was not suggesting that these categorisations were biological but stemmed from experience and circumstance. Even though the language of residuum has changed the sentiments are still with us. Over the last 30 years cultural distinction in relation to class politics have become increasingly important in a sense of where and how we belong to society, and to our wider understanding of belonging. Skeggs (2008) argued that especially during the New Labour years of Government that class politics became a measure of a success or failure of a group or an individual that could not identify or

rejected the 'new opportunities' of a society that was economically successful and offered much to those who would take advantage of them.

Twenty years on from the historic New Labour victory which ushered in the concept of social exclusion, a policy that ultimately blamed the working class for their lack of social mobility because of their 'bad culture' further individualising inequality and poverty rather than focusing upon a system that socially excludes groups. It seems that the class politics and the class prejudices that political discourse both left and right have tried very hard to ignore, has returned sharper, and unexpectedly through the lens of membership to the European Union. This paper will look through the politics of the referendum aimed to decide our membership within the European Union and will focus upon the class struggle within the United Kingdom that appears to transcend the left and right politics.

Consequently there is an argument to be made that class politics, and the cultural distinction of class within the UK had the biggest influence in determining a working class 'Leave Vote' in the 2016 referendum within the UK. Since the referendum there have been several strands of debate, some of which are included in this special issue that relates to demographic voting patterns. Dorling, Stuart, Stubbs (2016) argued that in regards to class, the result was far from clear cut, citing a more confused picture that included wealth, age, geographic location and class. Indeed they argue that creating a clear statistical explanation has not been possible, particularly as the referendum was 'visceral'. Despite the attempts of many social researchers in trying to make sense of the referendum result into sharp and discreet demographic patterns and reason (Antonucci L. et al 2016). Too many social researchers have attempted to understand emotional elements of local and national political by discreetly isolating a variable and thus failing to capture the longitudinal damage ( Booth noted as experience and circumstance) that class inequality causes in what Bourdieu (1977) argues as symbolic violence.

The aim of this paper is to explore the narrative account through ethnographic methodology from working class 'leave' voters in what initially appears to be opposing geographical spaces, East London, and the ex-mining towns of Nottinghamshire. The ethnographic approach that focuses upon critical narrative offers a framing and context to the individual anger and apathy of being 'left out', while simultaneously shows the structural process that being 'left out' has been part of working class political narratives for over 30 years. This bottom-up approach

allows us to go beyond the narrow view of the anger and apathy that was demonstrated often through the media lens during the referendum campaign and in the time since.

Consequently this paper offers a community studies based approach in both research sites, that draws out narratives, class positioning, and cultural and political rhetoric from within and on the outside of both communities. Even though geographically East London, and North Nottinghamshire appear far apart in distance, demographic, and culture there are similarities in the discourses around disillusionment, and of powerful forms of localism and community. In class terms both groups within these communities have similarities in their recognition of the process and rejection of 'class othering'. What I argue is that placed within a wider context of the deepening significance of class inequality within the UK the marginalization of these groups over generations has understandably led to their democratic rejection of the UK's membership of the EU. Therefore temporarily framing working class politics, identity, and culture around the 'Brexit' and consequently dismissing the outcome as 'irrational' or 'xenophobic' betrays a lack of sociological understanding of the long-term progression of narratives and markers of class as a social and longitudinal formation over generations (see for example, Bourdieu, 1977; Skeggs, 2000, 2004). Elites in the political classes as well as middle class 'cosmopolitans' appear to have lost any awareness or reflexivity in understanding, or acknowledging working class experience without lapse towards demonizing and sermonizing. Consequently misunderstanding, and misrecognising working class political anger and defaulting to corrosive narratives about a 'feckless poor' that recalls Victorian-era poverty discourses (Savage et al, 2015: 352).

### **All Roads Lead to the M1**

Its raining hard and I'm sat in my car trying to orientate myself amongst the long connection of empty grey 'A' roads that connect up each town and village, there is nothing, no landmarks, just empty long roads with occasional large corrugated roofed warehouse's on each side. Some of them have the blue EU signs on them, the European Union funded parts of this road, and ultimately the creation of the corrugated warehouses that flank it. There are only large articulated type lorries on the road. The type with the cab and an attached wagon, they seem to be enormous on these roads that cut through the Nottinghamshire countryside. They are in front of me to the side of me, and coming at me in the opposite direction I cant see more than a few yards in front, and looking over at the opposite carriageway it is exactly the same. I don't see any bus

stops, or people, over several miles. At each junction where one road meets another there is a Brewers Fayre, faux and recently built public houses, they all look the same redish brown brick with fake rustic style gables, and bright large menus advertising 'all day breakfast for £5.50' I think they are supposed to look like farm houses, which seems funny as they knocked down farmhouses to build this road 20 years ago. You cant get to them without a car, there is no public transport. Warehouse, empty space, lorry, Brewers Fayre, empty space, lorry all pass by there is little else. I drive for 30 minutes still no change in the landscape, more road, more lorries, more warehouses. Until I come into the small village centre. The local pub 'The Miners Arms' appears to have closed down a long time ago, and the church looks abandoned. As I drive through the village down what would have been the Pit Lane, I know this because I used to live here and because of the hill in the distance. The hill would have been the 'pit top' once black and covered in the dirt and water that gets dug out of a coal mine the 'slag heap' now a green empty hill in the distance. There is nothing left apart from a mixture of 'two up, two down' terraces some with bright coloured hanging baskets outside, and some that would be at home in Orwell's descriptions in Road to Wigan Pier, still covered in pit dust ingrained over generations, and abandoned. There is no one around, no post office, no pub, no corner shop. The end of the village comes as quickly and as unexpectedly as it started, a small monument to the mining industry that had born and brought life to this part of country is left, a 3ft tall replica winding wheel painted red and black with the name and the dates of the opening and closing of the pit, next to it is a small lump of stone that was once the War memorial from the Great War Once it was a tall cross but has now lost its upper horizontal axis, I smile because its a bit like the debate on class inequality at the University where I work. There is a village, or a town like this every mile or two in this part of the UK, now only connected by the soulless 'A' roads that connect them to the M1. The rain keeps coming.

Context is important when examining class experience, and the ethnographic vignette above taken from my research diary out of context may initially appear unrelated to the overall debate in this special issue. However the connection between space, place, and class inequality is central in understanding the anger, the hurt, and the seemingly casual way that working class people all over the UK appeared to vote against their interests in a referendum orchestrated and organised by the internal troubles of the British Conservative Party. This part of the UK overwhelmingly voted to leave the EU despite securing funding from the European Development Fund for what they call 'place shaping' (North Nottinghamshire

Development Strategy 2015) and have been allocated £214M for 2014-2020 one of the largest in the country.

The vote to leave the European Union has generated a lot of dismay, disquiet, and perhaps guilt within academic, media and political circles. One might argue here that class inequality and distinction has shifted over the last 30 years to such an extent that those who were once thought of as 'respectable working class' are now the residuum. This has happened seemingly without the awareness or knowledge of experts, media, politicians and business leaders. The shock and regret following the result has been accompanied by a tone of anger and indignation, particularly in trying to find 'blame' as to whose fault it was that this seemingly tragic and self-defeating decision had been ushered in, with special attention upon working class leave voters.

The focus of this paper is upon people who voted 'Leave' or those who did not vote at all. Their stories provide detail and context in describing the personal, social and political cycle of anger to apathy for a group of men and women in East London and another group in the former mining communities of north Nottinghamshire. Both of these groups live on low incomes below the national average wage, either because they are low-paid, retired, unemployed, or working in precarious conditions (Findlay and Thompson, 2017; Standing 2014). This paper draws upon ethnographic research I have undertaken in East London between 2013-2016, and immediately after the referendum in the north Nottinghamshire ex-mining towns.

While the population of London was one of the few areas of England that voted strongly to 'Remain' it is important to explore the standpoints of London 'Leave' voters and to contrast the views of these Londoners to those of the post-industrial towns in my study. This is important because of the seemingly obvious and opposing geographical contexts to their lives. One group lives in a 'global', cosmopolitan, multicultural city with great wealth and located at the centre of the country's (and to a significant extent Europe's) financial economy. The other group live in small, isolated communities that have been devastated by de-industrialisation and where Government funded-support is essential on every level. What I argue throughout this paper is there are definite likenesses in each group's logic and experience in class terms despite their different geographies and varied community identities.

### **Connecting Social exclusion**

During the 'New Labour' era of British politics from 1997 onwards 'Social Exclusion' was a heavily pushed political narrative used by Government and academia to focus upon inequality, or rather the ways working class people 'socially excluded' themselves. Although the conception and existence of the term social exclusion was initially debated in France

throughout the 1970's and into the 1980's, the combating of 'social exclusion' has since become a part of the wider European agenda. Hilary Silver's article in 1994 (pp.534-578) explored the origins of social exclusion in France from as far back as the 1960's, Silver argues that the term social exclusion had a specific meaning, an extension of the French Republican tradition and 'exclusion' in France was understood as a breakdown of the structural, cultural, and moral ties which bind a society (pp. 534). This model then broadened out to consider groups who had become marginalised, economically, socially, or culturally. Loic Wacquant (2008) argues that it was in the late 1970's in France that the model of 'exclusion' was identified as the 'new poverty' (2008 p.163). Focusing specifically upon the long term and recurrent unemployed but also those within specific neighbourhoods 'Le banlieue', the outer suburbs of French cities where the poorest working class and immigrant citizens often resided. In the largest of those cities 'Le banlieue' often became disconnected to the cities they sat on the margins of, and many of the residents found themselves physically and socially marginalised and excluded from the 'norms' of French life (Levitas 1998 pp.22-28).

However the term social exclusion as we understand it in the UK today is a term which is connected to 'New Labour' who became interested in the European concept in the early 1990's before their election landslide victory in 1997. Intellectuals close to New Labour helped to popularise social exclusion. Anthony Giddens (1998) in his book 'The Third Way' argued that social exclusion can occur both at the bottom of society and at the top, in the former when people are cut off from opportunities that society can offer, and the latter when affluent groups withdraw from public life. According to Welshman (2006 :185) New Labour was especially drawn to Giddens work on exclusion in regards to the argument that exclusion at the bottom may be both economic and cultural. Within this particular argument Giddens (1998) states that like exclusion at the top, exclusion at the bottom is self-producing, although it has never been clear what he meant by this. However Giddens solutions to exclusion was clear, he argues in 'The Third Way' that conventional poverty programmes should be replaced with community-focused approaches that emphasise self help, support networks, and a culture of social capital (1996 :109-117). Giddens argued that to be excluded was not the same as being powerless to influence one's own circumstances, he argued that;

*'The social and economic factors that can lead to exclusion are always filtered through the way individuals react to problems that confronts them...solutions should therefore have an enabling approach building on the action strategies of the poor, with a stress on initiative and responsibility'* (Giddens 1998 :105-107)

Giddens approach to social exclusion as he stresses is as much about how individuals react to problems as it is about the problems themselves. Therefore the behaviour of those experiencing exclusion is important because it not only explains how a person or a community becomes excluded but also the processes of inclusion, how a person or community becomes included into the norms of society.

The election of the New Labour government in 1997 inaugurated a new period of 'policy-making for Britain' (Haylett 2003) in which social exclusion became a central policy target. Within the first year of the New Labour Government the 'Social Exclusion Unit' was launched in order to '*fight evil with a new name*', '*social exclusion*' (Blair T. 1997 in Levitas 1998 p.7). New Labour's definition of social exclusion within the UK according to Tony Blair in December 1997 where Blair outlined government plans to tackle social exclusion in the following way;

*Social exclusion is about income but it is about more. It is about prospects networks and life-chances. Its a very modern problem, and one that is more harmful to the individual, more damaging to self-esteem, more corrosive for society as a whole, more likely to be passed from generation to generation than material poverty.* (Blair T. 1997 in Welshman 2006 p.183)

This definition laid out in 1997 clearly shows that New Labour's emphasis regarding poverty and disadvantage was the structural causes of deprivation, but also an acknowledgment the role of behavioural factors, stressing the way that exclusion can be passed on through generations. The hallmark of New Labour's policy approach initially was 'connection', connecting those whose behaviour they thought of as problematic with 'opportunities' to change that behaviour and enter and compete in the modern labour market.

This rhetoric from New Labour in 1997 connected inequality to 'ideas of culture', or of types of culture and cultural groups, for example 'sub-cultural' welfare groups living on socially excluded and deprived council estates which these concepts have defined as 'sink estates' along with all the other symbolic and actual definitions which come with the term. David Sibley (1995) argues that 'other' people and 'other' neighbourhoods are constructed out of the geographies of belonging and exclusion, which can be local or global (1995 p.69). The boundaries of society appears to have shifted, including more of the population, and class divide becomes more elusive, then living space combined with the class positioning of those who live on the margins of a society are key indicators for the rest of the population to identify what Sibley called 'the imperfect people' (p.69) but what Booth called 'the residuum' the silt that falls to the bottom having no purpose to its environment.



## **Researching Marginalized Communities: Narrative Counts**

My research methodology since 2004 has been to undertake critical, public and political ethnography which maps the processes of marginalization. The focus has always been to understand the macro structures of inequality from the micro experience through the collection of narrative (Mckenzie 2012, 2013a, 2013b). Within my methodology I have often used my own class position, experience and politics in gaining access to what sometimes can be described as 'hard to reach' and marginalized communities. Collecting personal narratives, and thus understanding wider contexts of structural, social and political histories and accounts is a long tradition in the ethnographic craft (see for example Cornwell, 1984; Skeggs, 2000; Young and Wilmott, 1962; Willis, 1977). The research presented in this paper is only a small part of a much larger argument related to class inequality, geographical valued and de-valued space, and the wider debate of belonging (Mckenzie 2015, Savage 2015, Wacquant 2008). In the tradition of the ethnographic craft this is not a pursuit for objective 'truths' or 'laws' but to open the context of 'being there', the emotional and visceral experiences of the community themselves, getting a sense of and in some sense sharing in what Bourdieu might have called the 'habitus' of these communities. The purpose of this deep and critical methodology is to generate research but also to challenge the contested nature of social class: to see how the local people of these communities understood and discussed central sociological issues associated with class such as opportunity, work, housing, wealth, status, and political representation. Although these debates have featured regularly, but very superficially, in the media surrounding the unexpected Brexit results this paper and the wider research aims to offer a more sociologically detailed critique.

Conceptually, this article and the wider research is informed by ongoing debates in the sociology of class and social distinction, and is heavily influenced by Pierre Bourdieu's pioneering work on cultural capital, through to more recent British work on changing class formations, see for example, (Reay, 1998, 2005, 2007; Savage et al, 2015; Skeggs, 2000; 2004). The traditional markers of class (e.g. educational level, occupation, wages) as only ever partially explained and accounted for socially-constructed formations of inequality. The sociology of Bourdieu, and now the sociology of others such as Savage, Skeggs, Reay, and Lamont sees class inequality as cultural as well as economic and should be conceptualized as a dynamic relationship to capital and a process rather than a given (Savage et al, 2015; Lamont 2012; Hebson, 2009; Reay, 1998, 2005, 2007; Skeggs, 2000, 2004). However, this does not neglect the crucial role played by economic isolation especially in relation to the Brexit vote and the patterns of class exclusion that are a combination of many factors: economic, cultural,

social, ethnic and identitarian. The people who participated in my study, like others in similarly excluded positions (see Lamont, Beljean, Clair 2014, Skeggs 2000, Willis 1977) could only 'trade' in social and cultural capital that had very little worth beyond the bounds of their own local communities. Repeated across the UK, when coupled with the share of the Leave vote constituted by middle class conservative voters predominantly located in rural regions, the sum total of the leave-voting 'locals' was enough to outnumber the 'cosmopolitan' 'Remainers'; typically these Remainers are middle-class, urban, white-collar professions and who possess economic, social and cultural capital of much broader value. The cosmopolitan middle class reaction of shock and outrage as regards working-class Brexit voting patterns risks contributing to narratives of a 'feckless poor' that will only exacerbate further social exclusion, and class distinction.

### **An[other] Minority: Feeling 'Left Out' in London**

I'm on my weekly walk around Whitechapel with 'Peter' a 66 year old resident living in one of the very last blocks of housing association flats left in the area. I do this walk with him every week he's lived here for 40 years, and he knows every inch of this place, before he became seriously ill he used to be a street cleaner, and being on the streets is where he says he belongs. 'Peter' stumbles and grumbles his way around the new streets that have been created out of the old Eastend he says it feels like he lives on a 'Reservation'. The housing estate where 'Peter' lives is a hundred years old and survived the Blitz, he doesn't think it will survive the 'Yuppie drones' his words to describe the luxury apartments built around him, the people who live in them, and the process. He hopes he can live longer than the estate, he doesn't want to move out, but he doesn't want to be 'drowned out by the yuppies'. The Glass and chrome skyscrapers shoot up over every spare inch of Aldgate the boundary between where the Eastend meets the City of London. 'Peter' complains at the speed they have gone up he thinks 12 of them have been built in 3 years, he has no idea what their purpose are apart from what the marketing suite advertises on large stylish boards on the outside of the development.

*'Stylish 1,2,3 bedroom luxury apartments 9 minutes from Liverpool Street Station, 9 minutes from the London Stock Exchange, expected 50% return on investment within 5 years'*

We look into the window its swish, bottled water on the shelves, a chandelier glistens under the halogen lights, there's a posh polished chrome coffee machine 'Peter' says he cant tell if this is a 'bistro or do they sell flats?' The people who work in the showroom seem annoyed we are staring in and wave us to go away. 'Peter' sticks two fingers up at them and tells them to 'Fuck off' through the glass. As we walk away from the marketing suite a security guard appears from out of a doorway in another glass and chrome building, he follows us a few hundred yards talking into his radio. 'Peter' turns round and sticks two fingers up to him, a small but daily act of resistance.

As I introduced (above) one of the mining communities in Nottinghamshire as context for an increasingly unequal Britain that is distinct upon place, space and class. This vignette from my East London research shows a continuing narrative that a sense of unfairness, injustice, and exclusion are central themes around political understandings from working class people living in the heart of the global city and amongst incredible amounts of wealth. I did the same walk with 'Peter' weekly between 2014-2017, he knew where bombs had dropped during both Wars, and he showed me gaps in existing buildings that had been filled in after 1945. 'Peter's narrative was of loss and fear although he never admitted the fear, I knew he was afraid for his future. Over the three years I took photographs and recorded the sights and sounds in this part of London and each week 'Peter' became agitated and angry.

Peter 'I've had enough of this, I'm not doing this no more'

Lisa 'Why whats the matter'

'Peter' I don't like to look at it, its all gone, they don't want me here, this time next year there will be 5,000 yuppies here, I can see them dripping in day by day.

Lisa 'I thought you liked being on the streets, that's your thing'

Peter 'I did..I do.. but whats the point here, I don't belong here, and they don't want me, and I've got nowhere else to go.

During the 3 years we walked and talked there had been two general elections, and the European Union referendum. 'Peter' had not taken part in any of them, when I asked him why he pointed up to the glass and chrome soaring into the sky 'will any of it stop all of this?'

Over the same period of time I was walking the streets with 'Peter' I was also meeting a small friendship group of women in the local café. I had first met 'Sally' in the housing office in 2013 when she was trying secure housing for herself and her two small children. When I met 'Sally' she had recently been made homeless by a private landlord she owed £200 in rent arrears.

'Sally' introduced me to her friends and we met weekly in the café on the high street. Over the three years we talked about everything from local schools, to what hair dye we used.

Throughout the time I was meeting with 'Sally' she was 'officially' homeless, her family that had lived in the area for generations were 'sharing' her so she didn't have to move out of the area.

I met the women regularly and we mostly talked about schools, children, and family and always the dire situation of housing in London. There was 25,00 people on the waiting list for social housing in this borough and zero availability, families were expected to serve time in temporary accommodation in hostels before they could even think about getting on the list. During the election campaign in 2015 and as the pre-election televised debates were taking place we met and talked about the election. The women showed little to no interest in these debates and in the election campaign in general. None of the women at this point intended to vote.

The women and 'Peter' prioritised the politics that directly affected them and their families, such as the lack of housing, the shortage of places in local schools, and the inadequacies of local health service provision, along with their lack of visibility, power and voice locally and nationally. The larger issue of the 2015 general election was simply not a priority. They felt estranged from national politics despite living only three miles away from Westminster and Parliament.

I also went to see 'Peter' who had not voted in the general or local elections in 2015 and he had not voted in the referendum. He was apathetic about the result, and didn't see how it would affect him in any way. He told me;

'these yuppie drones will be filled with 5,000 people next year, the café has gone, the newsagents have told me they can't hold on, why should I care, there's nothing left for me here whether we are in or out and I've got nowhere else to go?'

## **Post-Brexit and Post-Industrialisation**

Soon after the referendum I began a small research project in two of the many ex-mining towns on the Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire border, in England's East Midlands. The vignette (All Roads lead to the M1 above) was written as I drove around these towns and villages mapping space, and place where I had been born and raised. These were small towns and pit villages that had been left in a state of devastation since the mining and manufacturing industry was closed during the early 1990s. Other forms of de-industrialisation soon followed as the textile

industries also began to close. The area had also been the site of large scale manufacturing, especially in the form of hosiery and other clothing manufacturing industries that employed a large female workforce for several generations. Thousands of women in the area had been employed in the hosiery and textile industries until they too closed during the mid-1990s, when companies turned to low-cost overseas supply chains.

Despite over 30 years of de-industrialisation, these communities are still made up of those families who have lived there for generations, with little mobility moving in or out. Economic and social well-being indicators for these regions of the East Midlands are well below the UK average, with nearly a third of all children in the region officially classed as living in poverty. Although the official long term unemployment rate of only 6% there is widespread under-employment and poverty-level wages (Nottinghamshire County Council 2016). Most of the coal mines and manufacturing industries closed in the early 1990's leaving very little in employment opportunities until the newer warehouse and distribution centres started to appear in the region in the 2000s. However these jobs were deskilled, with no prospect of career development and poorly paid in relation to the mining and other manufacturing jobs that had been lost. The work does not go beyond 'warehouse picking': often on very poor employment conditions such as zero-hours contracts, and stringent and de-humanising security checks. This type of employment may have 'made up numbers' in regards to the employment figures, but economically, socially, and politically they offer very little to the thousands of people that work within them. It has been well documented that the strength of the old manufacturing and mining communities was their sense of the 'collective' or solidarity, whether that was through working identities, gender identities, or through institutions like local party politics, churches, and trade union affiliation. Usually all of these elements were intertwined. This sense of collectivism, class pride and stability that had long and hard-fought histories in this area had been hollowed out along with the manufacturing industries themselves, and it was precisely this absence of solidarity that had made this area change from a Labour and union stronghold home to the respectable working class to an area with much less clear political leanings.

I spoke to two groups; women that had once worked in the clothing manufacturing industries, and men that had worked in mining. Throughout all of my interviews and interactions in these communities there was an overwhelming deep sense of sadness and loss. The tone was not the same as that of the anger and resentment that had often been prominent among the Londoners. Despite the overwhelming vote to 'leave' that emerged in the area's voting pattern in the referendum, the people here were not optimistic or celebratory about the prospects,

processes or outcomes of voting leaving. They, too, were confused and hurt by what they were reading and hearing about what was being said about them and 'people like them' in the media and social media. Understandably, they didn't like been called 'stupid' 'ignorant' and 'left behind'. The old miners especially were upset by the way some media sources were calling them racist, and not understanding the arguments. Many of the ex-miners told me they had voted to leave the European Union because they had watched the community where their families had lived for generations being devastated. They were worried that their grandchildren were going to leave the area, and they had seen their adult children taking out 'payday loans' because they were struggling so badly.

When I visited 'Jan' and 'Harry' both in their seventies at their home in one of the ex mining towns in Nottinghamshire it was difficult to find their house the new stretch of A38 had sliced its way right through the street, meaning the street had been cut in half by the dual carriageway. When I arrived 'Jan' was making soap baskets to sell at the autumn fair for the local hospice, a tradition she had kept up since working in one of the hosiery factories. Machinist's had always made what made be called now 'arts and crafts' objects in their lunch hours and donated them to jumble sales, and local fairs for various different charities. 'Harry' made me a cup of tea and he told me how he and 'Jan' felt totally abandoned, and didn't understand what was happening to the town, and the area where they had both lived all their lives. The factory that 'Jan' had worked in had been closed down in the early 1990s and 'Harry's' pit had gone about the same time. Neither of them had worked since, both living off pensions for over 20 years.

**Lisa** 'didn't you ever think about going back to work?'

**Harry** 'No... after 40-odd years down pit I'd had enough and 'Jan' just couldn't face it....you know starting somewhere else'

**Jan** 'I'd worked in that place since my kids went to school... I was quite heartbroken when it shut down.. where was I supposed to have gone....all factories had gone...I mean Meritina Factory at the back of our house...I mean that's not even a factory anymore its just a warehouse now'

**Harry** 'yes they don't bloody make owt anywhere now...I've heard Meritina now is owned by a Chinese company there used to be hundreds going in there of a morning...I don't see hardly anybody going in or out now apart from lorries in middle of the bloody night'

Both men and women of all generations shared similar fears and worries about the amount of warehouses opening in the area paying very low wages and offering only zero hours contracts. Although there was an undeniable fear in these communities about 'outsiders' coming and taking what little was left, these views were directly connected to feeling abandoned, struggling financially, and feeling totally remote from mainstream political parties. There was no doubt that the people I spoke to here have lost faith in their Labour Party representatives both locally and nationally. The Labour Party, that they thought once was supposed to represent working class people had failed, the employment available offered nothing in hope or self-respect and the people here were barely meeting the bills. However the ultimately source of anguish for the people in these communities that had long histories of being part of the Labour movement was they knew the large distribution centres they were forced to work in were exploitative.

### **'Left Out': Versus 'Left behind'**

The general political comment around the working class vote to leave the European Union Since June 2016 has been predominantly that of 'the left behind'. Since the referendum result there have been thousands of column inches of opinion and commentary trying to analyse the 'leave' result that few expected. A phrase that has kept appearing since in relation to working class 'leavers' was 'left behind'. According to the many experts and commentators people, places, and even cities have been 'left behind'. The New Statesman ran a whole series of 'left behind' articles examining particular towns and cities like Bradford, Stoke on Trent, and Mansfield that mainly focused upon post-industrial devastation, and xenophobia (Shackle 2016).

While there is clearly some truth in this position, the 'left behind' rhetoric is simplistic and to some extents the 'left behind' rhetoric is incorrect and disingenuous. The depth and intensity of the devastation that has happened to working class people, their communities, and their identities for over 30 years is not fully understood to those on the outside of those communities. By the mid 1980's and especially as the mines, the docks, and the factories closed, there has been a shifting process about how working class people in the UK are known and named, and in particular a growing problematization of the 'white working class'. Although all working class people have seen their incomes fall, and the weakening of opportunities for their children to get on the housing ladder, find well-paid jobs, and enter into higher education, it is the 'white working class' that has become named and known as not only economically impoverished but also culturally impoverished, represented as 'excess and

nothing, in the sense of having and being of no value' (Reay, 2007: 1049). Chris Haylett, (2000) a social geographer, wrote very perceptively almost twenty years ago that the white working class had become an embarrassing contradiction, by losing the symbolic status their colour and their class had awarded in the past and have become 'abject and white'. Consequently this has left many of those communities haunted with collective post-traumatic stress (Bright 2016).

With this in mind, the patronising 'left behind' rhetoric actively supports this de-valued identity of the de-industrialised working class. This purposeful misrecognition of these communities means there is little attempt to genuinely understand the structural nature of de-industrialisation, of class inequality, and of class prejudice. Consequently the 'left behind' rhetoric relies on the stereotypes and prejudices that the poor white working class are 'old fashioned', un-modern, have no mobility, longing for the past. As local and national politics swing backwards and forwards every 5-10 years and the economy booms and busts, housing bubbles inflate and shiny towers rise out of the ground, middle class parents can use their previously-collected capital (cultural, social and economic) to weather these storms. The overarching narrative amongst working class people in Britain like Sally in London, or the men and women in the mining towns is that they have nothing in their immediate history to draw upon and no economic or social capital to trade.

## **Conclusion**

The working class people who have taken part in my research tell of an absolute fear of the future that appears overwhelming and unbearable and it was very difficult for the people I had spoken with to articulate any hope at all. Although for a brief moment in 2016 the apathy of the British working class electorate subsided and gave way to a howl of anger despite being 'invisibly visible' being seen only when policy needed to draw upon their 'bad culture' to explain a deepening and widening unequal Britain. Women like 'Sally' and 'Anne' from London's eastend and men like 'Peter' and 'Harry' despite whether or not they voted in the referendum their howl was heard in Westminster revealing the levels of pain and hurt of those who had been left out of the successes and rewards that capitalism had created for a cosmopolitan middle class in parts of the United Kingdom. They had ruined the party they had not been invited to.

The women from East London had believed in 2015 that they were being ignored and 'didn't matter' they wanted to be seen. By 2017 'Sally' had been told by the local council that in order to secure a home she needed to manage her money better. This was difficult while living in



other people's homes, although she had started to manage 'better' by only eating every two days, however she ensured her children ate everyday. A fact she was proud of.

The people who had taken part in my research and had voted to leave the European Union did so not because they thought their lives would be better if Britain was not in the EU. They did so, as Sally had said, because they just couldn't stand it being the same. Despite the continued arguments around the United Kingdom leaving the European Union that will continue for many more years as 'Peter' from the Eastend predicated it is unlikely there will be any obvious positive effects for him or most of Britain's disenfranchised urban and regional poor. However what the referendum did highlight was the extent to which Britain is divided by class, and geographical location, it has been made clear that half of the population is not visible to the other half of the population. The people who were once categorised as 'respectable working class' have been de-valued in the last 30 years, and are now 'residuum'. A fact that perhaps middle class 'remainers' surmised as did Charles Booth in the 1880's they were of 'no political threat-just a social problem' a detail that no one had bothered to tell them. Consequently the real challenge for sociology now in these times of political, social and economic flux is how we understand and articulate class distinction, and how we expose deep structural inequalities that are hiding in plain sight behind the cultural distinction of class prejudice.

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